



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease of the liver that can be passed on to other people through certain activities. It is caused by an infection of the hepatitis virus. The disease can range from no signs of illness to a severe chronic infection. Most people will get better and have few problems; but in some people with chronic infections, hepatitis B can lead to severe illness, liver cancer, liver failure, and sometimes death.

How do I know if I have hepatitis B?

Talk to your doctor. Hepatitis B is known as a "silent infection" because you may have very mild or no symptoms. Since many people with hepatitis B do not have symptoms, doctors diagnose the disease by one or more blood tests. People who have hepatitis B will have to continue to have blood tests through their lifetime to determine if the disease is still present in their body.

Symptoms appear six weeks to six months after a person comes in contact with the virus. Symptoms may include:

- Yellowing of the eyes or skin (jaundice)
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Pale (clay-colored) stool
- Abdominal pain
- Joint pain
- Being very tired
- Dark-colored urine

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid that is infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. Even though many people do not know they are infected, they can still spread the virus to others. Examples of ways that people can be infected include:

- Having sex with an infected partner and not using a condom
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Sharing items such as razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers with an infected person
- Traveling to or being born in a country with moderate to high rates of hepatitis B (Southeast Asia, Africa, the Amazon Basin in South America, the Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East)
- Being born to a mother who has hepatitis B
- Getting a tattoo or piercing with equipment that isn't sterile
- Coming in contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person

Hepatitis B is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, coughing or sneezing.

How is hepatitis B treated?

There are medications available to treat hepatitis B. In most people, the infection will leave the body by itself. People with chronic hepatitis B should see their doctor to find out if the disease is getting worse and if medications and treatment are needed.

How is hepatitis B prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get the hepatitis B vaccine and avoid the activities that spread the disease. The hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective and is usually given as 3-4 shots over a 6-month period.

Other things to think about:

- Get tested for hepatitis B if you are pregnant, and talk with your doctor about the needed shots for your baby after it's born
- If you are infected with hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, semen, or tissue
- Inform your sex or needle sharing partners that you are infected with hepatitis B and that they should be tested
- Everyone living with you should receive the hepatitis B vaccination

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm> and <http://www.hepb.org/> and <http://www.hepfi.org/> and <http://www.immunize.org/>

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